

QUESTION:

Rick of Florida asks, "What are some examples of the longest State of the Union addresses in House history?"

RESPONSE:

The "State of the Union" address is actually of relatively recent origin. The only Constitutional reference for the President addressing Congress is found in Article II, section 3: "[The President] shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." President John Adams was the first President to address Congress personally in Washington D.C. when he welcomed the congressmen to their new capital city in 1800.

However, from the presidency of Adams onward, no President addresses Congress, rather the President would send hand written messages (known as the "President's Annual Message") commenting on the state of the union. The tradition of written messages lasted until 1913 and the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. On 8 April 1913, President Wilson came before a Joint Session of the House to address tariff concerns. Wilson addressed such joint sessions of Congress many times through his terms in office. The tradition of personal addresses for pressing national issues was continued by every President that followed Wilson.

The term "State of the Union Address" was first used was on 6 January 1947 for a joint session address of President Harry Truman. Truman's address was also the first time a Presidential address to both Houses was broadcast live on television. From that point onward, each President gave a personal, annual address to Congress commenting on the state of the country. The longest State of the Union address delivered by a President in the House chamber was on 24 January 1995 by William J. Clinton which was 9,190 words.